

ABUSE: An uncomfortable film

by Suzy Goldenberg
and Colin Tomlins

When film distributors are spineless, such bodies as the Ontario censor board become redundant. The failure of any Canadian distribution company to pick up Arthur Bressan's *ABUSE*, says more about the Canadian marketing system than it does about the film. The movie is more than capable of speaking for itself.

motion, and at surrealistic camera angles. Anyone can stomach the *actual* violence portrayed. There are other reasons why distributors are steering clear of *ABUSE*.

Hospitalized following the milk-drinking incident, an unconscious Thomas is viewed in the recovery room by the intern on duty and Larry (Richard Ryder), a student film-maker making a documentary on child

implications of making the film. To convince his advisor of his good faith, he arranges a brunch get-together with the teacher and the fourteen year old.

The meeting serves only to stress the power Larry holds over Thomas. When Thomas threatens the sedateness of the meeting by childish antics, Larry comes close to hitting him.

Larry's anger forces him to recognize how he is exploiting

misses a date with Larry.

Larry has concocted a wild scheme of "kidnapping" Thomas and taking him beyond his parents' reach. When Thomas fails to appear as expected, Larry panics.

Larry consults with the intern who treated Thomas who tells him he is, "incorporating Thomas into some kind of sick homosexual fantasy."

That evening Thomas phones

late and refusing to say where he has been. His father strikes him and Thomas slaps his astonished father in the face. His parents overpower him, and in the most painful scene of abuse, torture him on the linoleum kitchen floor. Shifting to the school theatre, the film within a film opens with Take 1 as Larry explains that he is a maker of a film not his own. He says the movie belongs to Thomas. It's Thomas's story.

Later we see Larry's apartment stripped bare; the occupant has left.

ABUSE is one of the few films to seriously explore child abuse. An even greater rarity, it does not shy away from intergenerational sex. Far from granting blanket approval to the couple's relationship, Bressan points out the power imbalance between the two, and questions the boundaries where abuse begins.

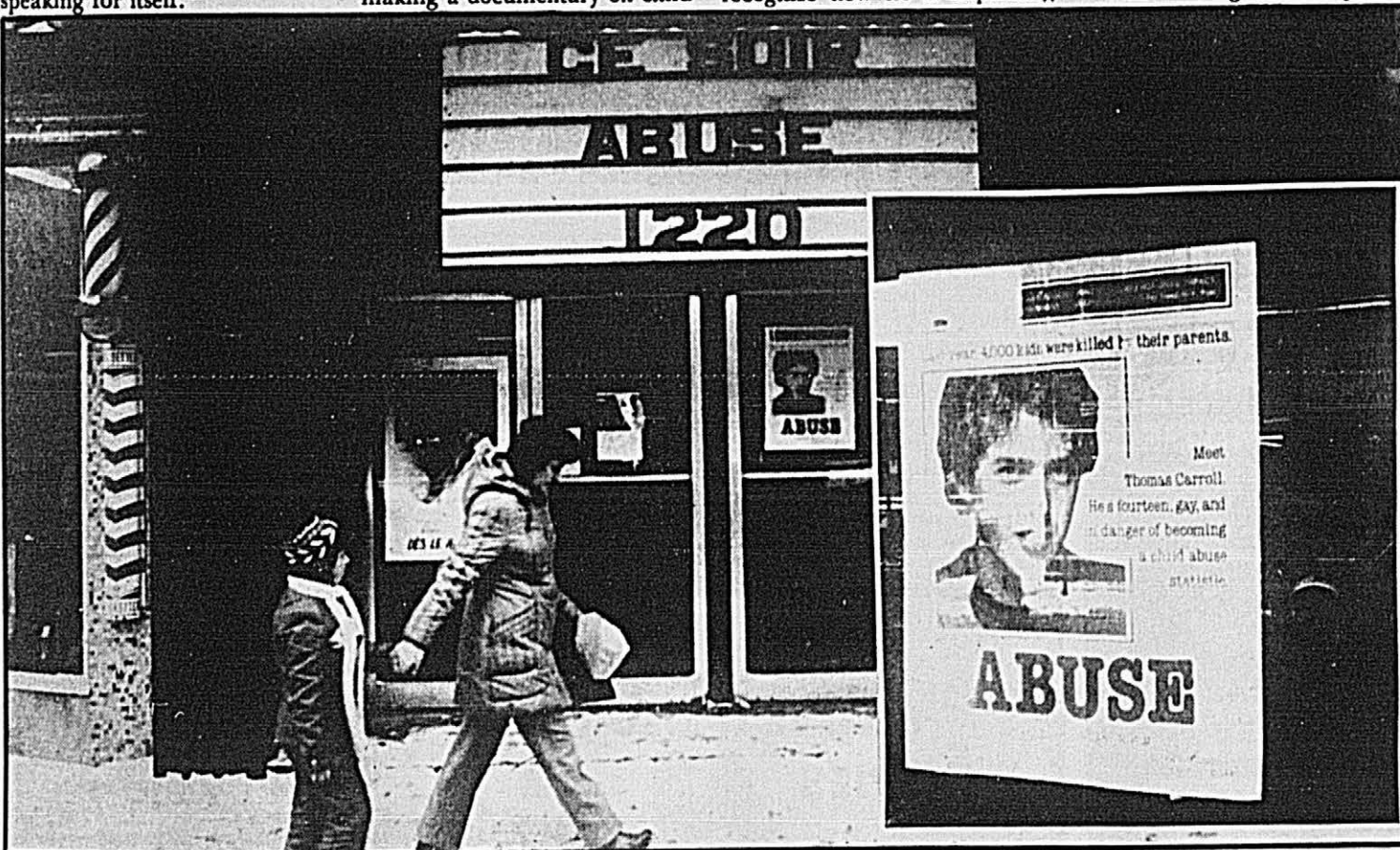
With the exception of a few made-for-television-monstrosities, this is the first dialogue on the possible roles of gays in the raising of children. It is one of the few films willing to acknowledge the existence of gay children. At times the film fails to convince, it doesn't fail to question. The problems it addresses do not lend themselves to pre-digested solutions.

In the film, Bressan has the social worker explain the scope of the central problem of the movie:

"Last year in America, there were 4,000 deaths, 65,000 sexual assaults, 200,000 beatings and that's just the tip of the iceberg."

Like rape, child abuse is a crime which often goes unreported and the victim is as stigmatised as the assailant. Like rape, victims of child abuse are left wondering what they did to bring on the violence.

This is an uncomfortable film.



The docu-drama, a combination of real interviews and staged scenes, brings to surface the deprivations and primal fears slumbering within the family. In the initial sequence of the film, Thomas Carroll (Raphael Sbarge) is caught drinking milk from the carton. His parents beat the fourteen year old until he enters convulsions.

In this, and all subsequent attacks upon Thomas by his parents, a reprimand is followed by an eerie silence and suspension of time — then the beatings begin. Bressan, in his film, is addressing the syndrome of child-abuse. The viewer who sees the movie through Thomas' eyes, knows when the violence is going to occur, but can never tell what form the abuse will take. The anticipation is tortuous. His parents alternate between breaking limbs, beatings, cigarette burnings, near drowning... his parents are also demonstrative in their affection. Thomas' mother asks for hugs, his father enters the adolescent's room to kiss him good night.

Bressan creates a film within the film, consciously employing numerous cinematic clichés. The scenes of abuse are filmed in slow

abuse. The two men debate reporting the suspected case of child abuse to the authorities. Thomas awakens to see the T-shirt Larry is wearing: "ABUSED? Call 932-4678."

The relationship between Larry and Thomas is what scared off the distributors. Thomas contacts Larry because he has ascertained that the film-maker, like him, is gay.

Thomas makes the first step in contacting Larry and arranges their meeting. The acting here is suitably stilted and awkward — both in situation and delivery.

Thomas agrees to participate in Larry's documentary. Larry, tired of the standard interviews with experts, recollections of former victims, and musings from the ever-insightful "man on the street", seeks to make his film more immediate, more shocking. He considers Thomas an ideal "case of abuse in progress."

Though supportive and sympathetic, Larry is exploiting Thomas, a fact he avoids recognizing for himself. His academic advisor questions him about this, to no effect. Larry attempts to justify his use of Thomas by claiming he is bright, articulate, and fully aware of the

Thomas. More importantly, he sees the dynamic of abuse recreated in his relationship with Thomas.

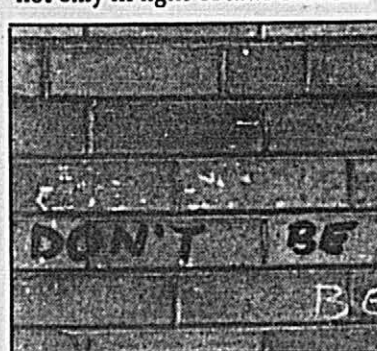
Larry escapes to the washroom to mull over this realization. Thomas follows him and proceeds to seduce him. Slowly and methodically, Thomas dries Larry's hands, his face, his neck. With the camera as voyeur behind the washroom mirror, the two embrace and kiss.

The ensuing scenes are among the film's weakest. This time the clichés are not particularly effective as the couple skate together, jog through the park, play at film-making. The outdoor shots are as unbelievable as the love scenes in *Harold and Maude*, or any other film about couples who seem to come together by accident. The section is redeemed by the playfulness of an exchange of bedtime stories. Larry reads *Hitchcock*; Thomas, with a music score in hand, pretends to read a soft-porn novel aloud.

The developing relationship is juxtaposed against the repeated beatings and torture that Thomas encounters at home. The film moves towards a climax when Thomas, for the first time,

Larry explaining that he had "gone through a particularly bad session" and there was no way that he could have gotten out of the house.

Turning to a social worker that he had interviewed for his movie, Larry outlines his plan to "save" Thomas. She points out the impracticality of his plan, not only in light of laws concern-



ing who owns a child. She stresses that only Thomas can break out of the cycle of abuse and reconciliation with his parents. Removing the child from the situation will not resolve it.

Thomas sees the first cut of the movie, where victim after victim tells abused children they should fight back and get out.

Later at home, his parents discipline him for staying out

Kenny Woroner

Kenny Woroner

The Canadian premiere is playing at Cinéma du Village (1220 Ste. Catherine E., métro Beaudry). Tonight is the last time to see the film with screenings at 19h30 and 21h30. Student admission is \$3.00 upon presentation of I.D. Given the problems of distribution, it is unlikely to be shown at a chain theatre.

POURQUOI PAYER PLUS CHER?



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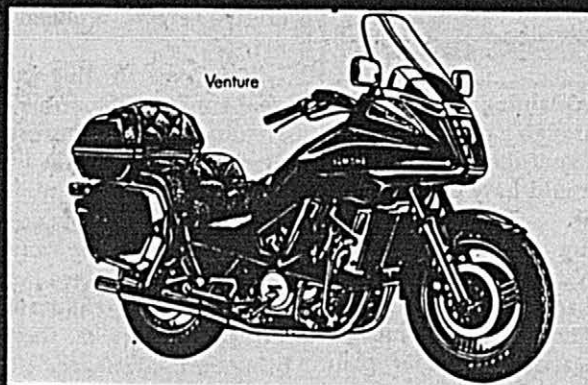


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GIVE A DAMN! Curious about volunteer work? Looking for future job experience? Community McGill can give advice. Contact us in Union 408. 392-8937.

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372 — LOST & FOUND

Lost: March 5th "Cognitive Processes Book" in room 522 in McIntyre Medical Building. Great sentimental value. If found, please call 488-5658 ask for Marina.

LOST. Red glass necklace. Last Saturday night in ballroom. REWARD. No questions asked. Please leave at Student Society General Office c/o Fisher or call 279-2416.

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374 — PERSONAL

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TO THE CHADIANs: Congratulations on a

job well done. Good luck with next year's MUN. My wish for success — Craig.

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385 — NOTICES

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Child Abuse, the truth finally frankly exposed in Bressan's film ABUSE at le Cinéma du village until Thursday. Métro Beaudry. Bring McGill I.D. for \$2.00 rebate. Info: 523-3239.

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"Irish Wake" St. Patrick's Day is near & on Friday, March 16, Taz is hosting a funeral at the Zete House.... Come pay your last respects.

Step down and saddle up with "Lu Ann", tonight at Moyse Hall, 8 pm. RESERVATIONS 392-4695.

387 — VOLUNTEERS

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listings

by Brendan Kelly

FILM:

Alphaville: The wit and the humour of Jean-Luc Godard's 1965 bizarre and radical sci-fi film comes from his refusal to go the special effects route and set it in the distant future.

Godard's logic: "C'est un film sur le futur, mais comme nous vivons dans le futur, c'est un film au futur antérieur, c'est-à-dire au présent."

Letting Cautin is a writer agent up against the absurd combine that runs mid-60's Paris. Alphaville is an inspired blend of detective story, science fiction and Godard's growing fondness for pop/revolutionary technique.

At the Cinéma du Québec (335 De Maisonneuve E./corner St. Denis) Friday, March 16 at 20:35. \$2.00. Tel: 842-9765.

Ernesto: Made by Italian director Salvatore Samperi, it has received raves from the Village Voice (Richard Goldstein compared Samperi to Fassbinder, Pasolini and Jean Renoir), Christopher Street and Jay Scott in the Globe and Mail. Scott called it "a breakthrough in the cinematic treatment of homosexuality."

It's from 1978 but it is only getting general release this year.

Ernesto is showing at the just-opened Cinéma du Village which is a welcome light in the Montréal movie landscape. The theatre specializes in alternative, lesser-known directors, with special emphasis on gay cinema. They revived the great tradition of giving a \$2 rebate to students with I.D. — that means \$3.00 for us poor academics.

1220 St. Catherine E. Starts a regular run on Friday. Tel: 523-3239.

Emile de Antonio: "From the very beginning my films were not only political; they also contained the main assumptions of Hollywood as film. To me, Hollywood produced industrial products like Twinkles...I am an American Marxist."

This weekend his America is Hard to See, a study of McCarthy's 1968 presidential campaign, and Underground, a documentary on the Weather Underground through interviews with members, will be screened as part of a retrospective on Antonio.

A rare chance to see the work of a veteran U.S. subversive filmmaker.

At the Conservatoire (1455 De Maisonneuve W.). America is Saturday, March 17 at 19:00 and



Today's consumption of culture is acceptable cannibalism. Menus adorn city walls. Feast well.

Underground is Sunday, March 18 at 18:00. \$1.75. Tel: 879-4349.

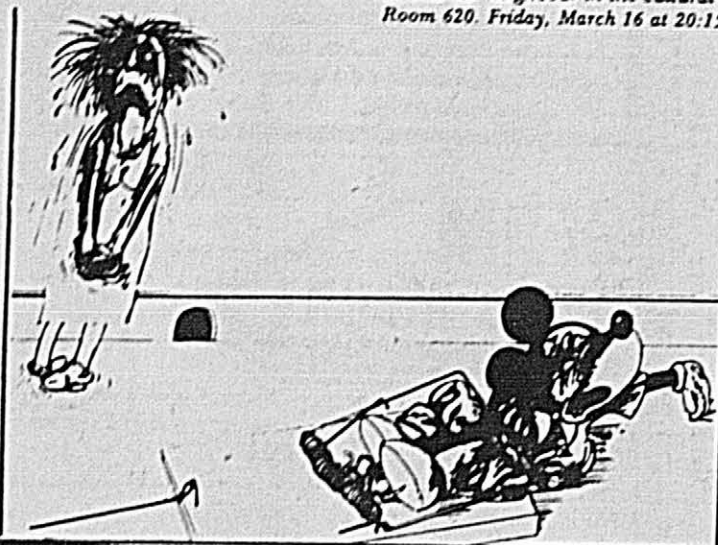
The Orange People: This is the downtown debut for this local "techno-folk" band, "cultivated from the world's urban grassroots." Supporting will be R&B artist The Amazing Dr. Charles.

Reggie's Pub, 7th floor, Concordia's Hall Bldg (1455 De Maisonneuve W.). Tonight at 20:00. \$3.50.

THEATRE:

Spontaneity in Drama: A presentation by Keith Jonstone. He is author of Impro: Improvisation and the Theatre and was one of the Artistic Directors of the Royal Court Theatre in London.

At the Hall Bldg (yes, it's Concordia again which confirms my suspicion that McGill is terminally behind our neighbour in the cultural sweepstakes), Room 620. Friday, March 16 at 20:15.



Hemmy's haunted past

by Brian Walker

Moveable Feast, a play by McGill student Marc Côté, opened last night in Morrice Hall. The play is told from the point of view of the aging Ernest Hemingway who looks back to his early years in Paris when he was struggling to become a writer, and was hanging around with the great literary lights of his day. The play is full of the colourful characters who created twentieth century fiction — Ezra Pound, Gertrude Stein, James Joyce and F. Scott Fitzgerald.

The play began as a director's project in the McGill drama department and was taken over by Margaret Mardrossian who directed this slightly more elaborate version. Although last night's performance was very high spirited I found the acting uneven and sometimes baffling. I couldn't always figure out what the actors were trying to do with their characters.

Mark Young played the older Hemingway. He had a fine voice with just the

right macho undertone that we expect from Hemingway, the rest of the actors spoke as if quoting (sic) with uncontracted words and a generally formal sound. The scenes where they broke out of this, like the boxing scenes, were the best.

The narrator often stopped the action and the actors froze in their places. This gave the work an anecdotal feeling that underlined the fact that all the events took place in Hemingway's mind, but it prevented the viewer from immersing herself in the action.

Yet I couldn't help but like this performance, and I think that the rest of the audience did too. Morrice Hall is the perfect place for this kind of play, it is so small that you feel right in the center of things. The period music, the brilliant stage movement and above all, the bizarre events in Hemingway's life, make this a captivating production.

A Moveable Feast plays until Saturday, 20:00.

The pass

by Brian Walker

Lu Ann Hampton Lavery Oberlander is McGill Drama's big production this term. The script, by Preston Jones, is of a much higher quality than *Nicholas Nickleby* and although I had reservations about the production it is by far the most interesting on the Moyse Hall stage this term.

The play gives us three glimpses into the life of a plucky young lady named Lu Ann Hampton. We follow her life, collecting husbands and last names. The first snapshot shows her when she is eighteen, just graduated from high school and getting to know her future husband Dale Lavery. Her n'er-do-well brother Skip matches them up together and they strike it off. Dale is a loveable galoot who has a sure job driving semi trucks and Lu Ann finds herself caught up in his dreams of life in a trailer home and domesticity.

When the second act opens, the dream has gone bust. Lu Ann is divorced and has been left alone with a little girl, Charmaine. She works in a local beauty

Fennario fig

by Brendan Kelly

Popular theatre is almost non-existent in the realm of Montréal drama. Plays like Marco Micone's *Addolorata* are about the working class — Italian immigrants in this case — but these plays are usually for a middle class audience. Theatre here — because of the high prices but also due to the mentality of most North American drama — is for people on the "right" side of the tracks.

The first step in this direction was the performance of David Fennario's *Joe Beef: a History of Montréal in Verdun* last week. It was a significant event for English theatre in our city and it certainly didn't deserve the condescending coverage it got in the Gazette.

Verdun calling

As showtime approached, the small auditorium in this school-turned-into-a Centre des Femmes on Verdun Avenue was beginning to fill up mainly with residents of Verdun and Pointe St. Charles — from teenagers to golden agers. There was a strong sense of this being a community event — people shouted greetings to each other across the hall — and there was the obviously desired feeling of a local reunion.

Fennario and other members of the Black Rock Theater were even there on the sidelines to greet the people as they came in.

The actors and actresses in the troupe are almost completely amateurs — which works absolutely to their advantage. When they first appear on stage, they introduce themselves and tell where they're from in the area. The men and women in the play are the same as the people sitting watching them.

I couldn't help contrasting this with the environment of Fennario's last play *Moving*. It was about the same community but, as many complained, there was something almost voyeuristic about the well-to-do Centaur audience laughing and enjoying the doings of the class they're essentially exploiting (maybe it sounds like dogmatic jargon but this is the context in which Fennario deliberately writes).

The calls to working class solidarity ring truer at the end of *Joe Beef* than the battle cries in *Moving*. The history lesson of learning to take the offensive gets a better response.

History as oppression

Joe Beef is a left-wing history of Montréal, with particular emphasis on the Irish workers of the Pointe St. Charles area, told through skits, songs, dances and jokes. Last week's performance, still a work-in-progress, is only part one of the history (part two, to be seen in the fall, will go from the end of the construction of the Victoria Bridge in the mid-19th century to the present).

The central character is tavern owner and union supporter, Joe Beef (Georges Bériault), who is like the m.c. for the evening. The play starts with the arrival of the French seigneur and priest in Montréal. They tell of their plans to expropriate the land and make money from the furs — and, of course, convert their red brothers to Christianity. We see the theft from the Indians then the exploitation of the imported French workers. Next comes the arrival of the British and they fight it out with the French — in a hockey game, with play-by-play commentary by Joe Beef and his assistant Mickey (Virgil Clappett Keyes) à la Hockey Night in Canada.

This skit is typical of the usually very funny, madcap humour of *Joe Beef*. The jokes with the song and dance work well enough and there's enough insightful historical detail so that you don't mind the lack of straight dramatic narrative. On occasion, the jokes fall flat — they're sometimes stale TV-level lines and the clichéd laughs at gays deserve special negative mention.

Fennario manages to cram a lot of little-known Montréal history into a 90 minute play. He succeeds in giving a gut-level Marxist interpretation of our past — the fur trade as primitive capitalist accumulation, the upper class' (Anglophone) building of Montréal on the backs of labour (both French Cana-

son of Lu Ann Hampton

and hangs around the local bar in her tight white smock. She's more calculating, she's lost her innocence, but she's still a pushover. She is Corky Oberlander, a worker with the Highway Department.

Only in the final act that the play comes together. Up until then I had the feeling that there was something missing. I didn't care about what was going on.

In the third act begins we have shifted forward ten years. Lu Ann is again, Oberlander dead in a car accident some years before. Lu Ann has moved back home to look after her mother, daughter and alcoholic brother. To support them she drives the Highway Wagon to welcome the new residents in a nearby subdivision. When she's home nights she has to fight to keep her brother from going out to the bar.

Deborah Kornachuk, who plays Lu Ann, does her best work in the final act.



Deb Kornachuk and Bruce Fox in *Lu Ann Lavery Oberlander*, part II of Preston Jones' *A Texas Trilogy*.

She slows down a bit, gives us a chance to see what her character thinks, shows us that she *does* think, and we are drawn in as we weren't in the first two acts. We begin to care about Lu Ann and her brother.

Its back

(and English). It was extremely obnoxious for the Gazette to call this "simplistic history" because I got more critical economic history out of it than I have out of most of the history I've ingested in a more academic setting.

Some of the characters come to life very successfully, especially the rich characters at the heart of this story like James McGill (Susann Leger), who gives his money to charity as long as they name it after him, Simon McTavish (Nelson C. Johnson) — "I'm a bastard but at least I'm not a hypocrite" — Molson (Jay L. Leno) and transportation tycoon Hugh Allan (Jim Sorley), whose house we now know as the Allan Memorial.

The play's dedication reads:

In 1871, Sir Hugh Allan, living in his thirty-two room mansion on the hill, spent over \$350,000 in government bribes trying to get control of the CPR construction contract.

In January of the same year, two children, one three-year-old and the other, eight-months, froze to death inside their home on King Street in Griffintown. This play is dedicated to them.

Joe Beef and Mickey, the working class characters appear mainly in the same situations. Particularly memorable is the take-off of a Molson's commercial, where Molson along with a group of workers extol the virtues of his beer. The reasons given in the advertising jingle are along the lines of "You're on your own, there's nothing you can do about it, so you may as well get drunk."

At numerous points like this, the audience erupted in warm applause.

The dialectics of drama

Fennario is unquestionably a political playwright. But a work like Joe Beef is not just a tract theatre. The jokes are about TV, sports, drinking, well-known Montrealers and personalities — in other words, it is the type of dramatic writing that is appealing for any audience from Pointe St. Charles to the east end of the island to Westmount.

Still theatre used for didactic ends. At the risk of sounding clichéd-1960's, Joe Beef is about raising people's consciousness and, for me, whether it be Clash or Under Fire or Fennario plays, that's a tremendously idealistic and self-aspirational goal and when it makes the grade, it does what art should do. Fictions are remade.

Responsibility for the strength of Joe Beef should go not just to Fennario, as writer and director, but to the Black Rock Theater — to the cast for strong performances and, more importantly, to the entire group, for the inspiration to get the project off the ground.

The crowd's the thing

I left Moving with a strong negative impression about where Fennario was working. The gap between his play and his audience was important enough to call into question the validity of the drama itself. Intrinsically, the play's structure was conventional, the politics imposed and the narrative unconvincing.

Joe Beef unequivocally resolves the audience contradiction (at least for the moment) and the new sprawling historical format — a series of non-linear lessons — tailor-made for Fennario's educational theatre.

After complaining about all the "bad things" I had written about him, Fennario just before the show, walked away and then, as an afterthought, turned around and said, "It wasn't because of you that we did this." He went off to talk to some friends in the crowd.

Lu Ann tells her old high school boyfriend Billy Bob that she wants to keep her invalid mother at home, that even though paralysed she is not a vegetable but a "big old beautiful flower". We realise that Lu Ann is thinking of her own future. She will end up just like her mother, and her daughter will grow up to follow the same road in the ever-repeating cycles of small town life.

Deborah Kornachuk's performance was outstanding. Unfortunately this can't be said for the rest of the cast. Greg Taylor, in the role of Dale Laverty, was quite convincing, and Paul Haddad's Skip seemed well developed (at least in the third act), but the rest of the acting was not memorable. Gail Hanrahan, as Lu Ann's mother, had the gestures and voice of a jealous sister instead of a nagging mother, and Nick Rumin as the older Billy Bob Wortman was little more than a caricature.

The cast spoke too quickly. I would like to have seen the characters take a little more time and relax into their lines. Where was the lazy languor of small town Texas? The characters buzzed around like a bunch of frenetic Scandinavians escaped from a Bergman film. Perhaps it was this that made it so hard to care about the characters.

The players spoke so fast that at times I couldn't keep up with the dialogue, which was a shame because it seemed quite witty with a lot of good one-liners. Jones' play is the second in a trilogy of dramatic works about Texas. All of the plays in the Texas Trilogy take place in the small town of Bradleyville. Jones got the idea for Lu Ann when he was working with the Highway Department in West Texas. He writes:

The crew would eat many meals at 'Dixie Dinette's' and truckstops when on the job. When I'd eat at those places I kept noticing, along with the other guys, the waitresses. Or we'd drive over to Big Spring sometimes for a beer. And there were Lu Anns all around.

I'd wonder, "What is the girl's background? How old is she? Has she been married before?" Although I never did sit down with one of those wonderful girls and interview her about her life, I suppose that I was even then putting together bits and pieces of information that eventually became Lu Ann's story.

The characters' Texan accents list around a bit as one might expect, but some of the players manage to hold onto their drawl quite well, notably Deborah Kornachuk who holds on to it till the end.

The beguiling sets by Caroline Sevigny gave a feeling of desolation and space, of hot Texas nights, that managed to make me forget the chilliness of the auditorium and the blizzard outside. At the back of the stage there was a long cloth coloured to represent the prairie sky, and in the first and third acts, a seedy little living room set at center stage. The effect was quite stunning.

But for all the cleverness and talent of the production I still left feeling somewhat unsatisfied — things only got going in the final act, and that the first two, particularly the second, were pretty tedious. However, I only saw the final dress rehearsal, and it could very well be that everything will fall together before an audience.

Lu Ann Hampton Lavery Oberlander plays at Moyse Hall, March 14-17 and 21-24 at 8 P.M. There are also matinees on Fridays at 1:30.



Menudo: Not really a Puerto Rican pop group, but a small band of Iranian child-soldiers who were captured by Iraq. Photo courtesy Iraq Army Public Relations.

Music to brush teeth

by Robert Costain

Menudo, the Puerto Rican musical group that took New York City by storm last year has finally released an English album, and it is definitely something that will appeal to bubblegum connoisseurs of all ages. What up until recently had been Latin America's best kept secret may finally be able to break into the mega-North American market.

Menudo, an Osmond-like ultra-mega-pop group, have dominated the hot Puerto Rican music scene for the past couple of years. They have a rotating membership of five — each member is replaced at the age of sixteen. Last year they staged their first North American tour, and NYC's pre-pubescent set took to them like fish to water. Unfortunately, North America wasn't able to fully appreciate their sublime appeal because they only sang in Spanish.

Literally, the group is savvy and articulate. Who couldn't catch the socio-economic-political overtones of lyrics like:

*Love songs are fine for some
But for me rock will always be number one*

I can spend the whole day listening to the radio

*Any radio station playing rock'n'roll
I don't care whether it's acid, hard or punk*

Gimme rock...rock-a-tri-ki-bak

Gimme rock...rock-a-tri-ki-bak

Gimme rock...rock-a-tri-ki-bak

Thanks to Mary Lynne M. Pagán's translation, we anglophones can finally derive the fullest from the quintet's articulate sensitivity on *Reaching Out*, their latest album.

Lyrics like these are obviously a veiled call to Revolution aimed at Puerto Rican youth. Menudo is crying out to young people to listen to the radio for news that The Revolution is coming.

The only thing that is somewhat bothersome about the album is that the names of those five heart-throb Menudans(?) is nowhere to be found on either the album cover or in the liner notes. I suppose that corporate Big Brother RCA wants to protect these poor lads from an unmanageable deluge of English mail that they couldn't answer.

It's obviously only a matter of time before Michael Jackson is forced to step aside in favour of Menudo as the world's top pop attraction. It's easy music; easy to write, easy to sing, easy to listen to, and easy to ignore. *It's the perfect music to brush your teeth to.*

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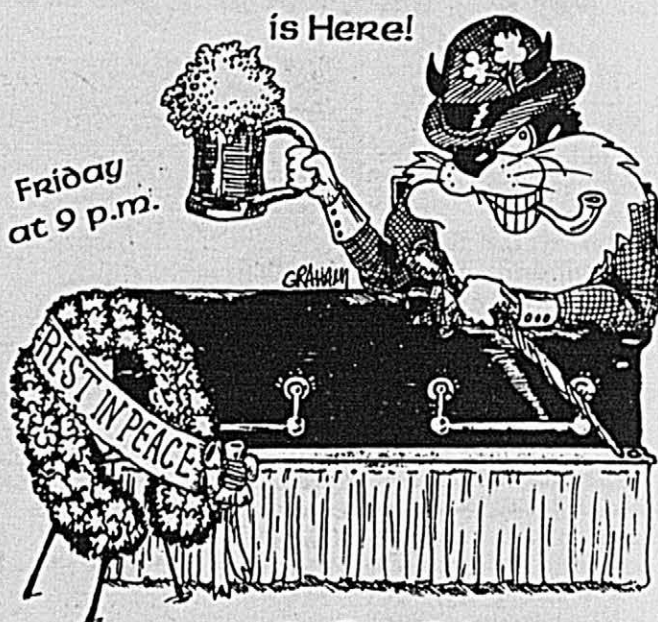
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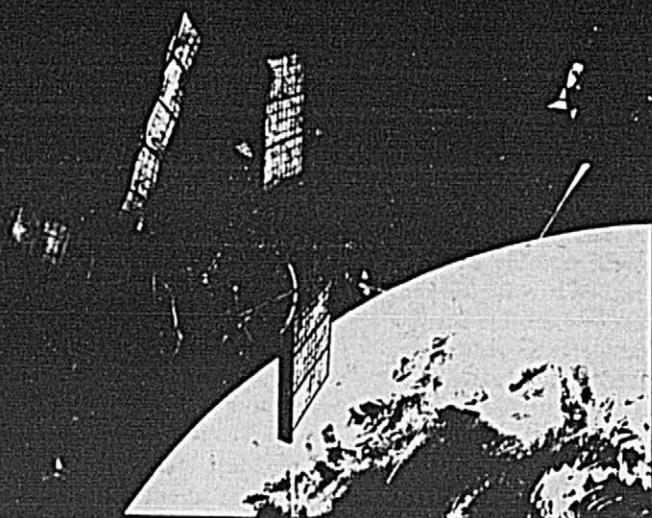
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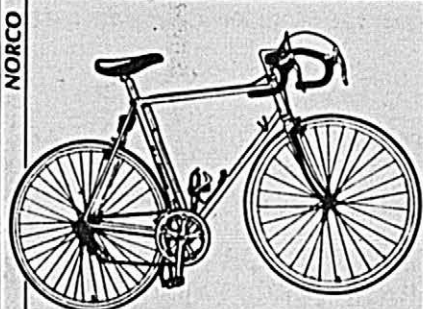
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